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Daily Highlights

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Secretary-General briefs Security Council on upcoming negotiations with Iraq.

* Security Council says Palestinian elections a major step forward in Middle East peace process; Secretary-General describes them as a solid basis for Palestinian self-determination.

* Secretary-General says despite political stalemate in Somalia, all-out civil war averted; urges world community to give UN agencies resources for essential humanitarian work.

* Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women questions Ethiopia on practice of female genital mutilation, which affects 90 per cent of country's women.

* UNICEF's Executive Board begins first regular 1996 session; to discuss future emergency operations and management reform.

* UNCTAD releases handbook on international trade and development statistics.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today briefed the Security Council on his upcoming negotiations with Iraq regarding the implementation of Council resolution 986 (1995) which permits the sale of $2 million of oil over six months in exchange for medicine and food.

The Secretary-General told correspondents that there had been negotiations before, but this time he was more optimistic because Iraq had agreed to negotiate on Resolution 986 which it had not done before.

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The Security Council warmly welcomed the Palestinian elections on Saturday and said they were an important step forward in the Middle East Peace process.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

In a statement by its President, Sir John Weston (United Kingdom), the Council congratulated the Palestinian Authority on the achievement, which reflected on the credit of all concerned. It also noted with satisfaction the conclusion of international observers that the elections were an accurate reflection of the Palestinian electorate's wishes.

The Council said the holding of the elections marked a significant step towards the fulfillment of the Declaration of Principles signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Washington on 13 December 1993. It reiterated its full support for the peace process.

The Secretary-General described the historic elections and widespread voter participation in the Gaza Strip, West Bank and East Jerusalem as an important step towards achieving the Palestinians' legitimate rights and as a solid base for their self-determination. He congratulated PLO chairman Yassir Arafat on his election to the Presidency of the Executive Authority of the Palestine Council and on the election of the Council's 88 members.

The Secretary-General said he hoped the elections would reinforce the parties' commitment to further progress in Middle East peace negotiations, concluding the interim arrangements and reaching agreement on the permanent status issues outlined in the Declaration of Principles. The United Nations would continue to support the peace process in every possible way, particularly through economic and social assistance to the Palestinians.

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Somalia has been dominated by a debilitating political stalemate for almost two years, according to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. In a report to the Security Council, dated 19 January, he said that although there had been no major progress towards national reconciliation, all-out civil war had been averted. However, there could be no durable peace without broad-based consultations among the Somalis.

The Secretary-General said, for the time being, he would maintain the three-person United Nations Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS) in Nairobi to expand contacts with all Somali parties and coordinate activities with interested Governments and regional organizations. However, because of the UN's own financial crisis, UNPOS could not respond to requests by many Somali leaders for financial and logistical support for their peace initiatives. Their best hope of attracting international help would be to show signs of concrete progress towards peace and reconciliation.

International assistance in Somalia was essential because of low food production and continued political instability, he said. Even in a worst-case scenario, UN agencies could help prevent another humanitarian crisis, while withdrawing their activities, particularly in the south, would have the opposite

effect. In 1996, needs would be at least as great as the last two years. Priorities were food, agriculture, empowerment of local populations and health care, particularly immunization against diseases such as cholera. Resources and security permitting, agencies planned to continue current programmes and expand rapidly if there was an emergency or acute nutritional problems. The Secretary-General urged the international community to help the agencies and stressed that all Somali parties were responsible for the security of humanitarian workers.

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Experts stressed the importance of education in reversing the traditional practice of genital mutilation which affects 90 per cent of Ethiopian women, at a meeting of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. The 23-member expert Committee, which is holding a three-week session at United Nations Headquarters, monitors the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and was reviewing Ethiopia's compliance with the treaty.

Committee members asked what kind of pressure privileged, educated women had brought on the Ethiopian Government to eradicate the practice of mutilation and whether it was planning to take any measures. They wanted to know if the practice was more prevalent among certain ethnic groups and whether a woman could refuse to go through with it. The experts also called attention to problems of polygamy, lack of basic health care, and the fact that Ethiopian women lost their nationality when they married a foreigner.

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The Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) will examine emergency operations and management reform during its first 1996 regular session which begins today at United Nations Headquarters. Other topics will include follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing last September and recommendations for its various country programmes.

The Agency's strategy is shaped by the changing nature of emergencies, new threats to children such as AIDS, and the increased scale and severity of many emergency situations. Last year, UNICEF enhanced its capacity to respond swiftly to emergencies. It set up an Emergency Operations Centre at United Nations Headquarters, created Rapid Response Teams, stockpiled a $3 million in supplies and equipment and hired a specialist in emergency operations and logistics. It also conducted a major review of lessons learned in Rwanda and Somalia.

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Data on world trade, including trade balances, commodity shares, balance of payments, financial flows and exports and imports can be found in the 1994 edition of the Handbook on Trade and Development Statistics just issued by the

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

The 511-page handbook gives an integrated treatment of development and related issues and is probably the most comprehensive single volume of detailed analytical data on developing countries and their role in the world economy. Attention has been paid to relevance and ease of interpretation, with the use of regional classifications in some contexts and economic classifications in others, to reveal structural differences between countries.

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